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## CASTE AT WEST POINT.

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ONE of the strangest phenomena of modern times is the fact that *character*, whether of individuals or institutions, offers no barrier to the immediate assaults of a free press. If the worst aspect is not at once accepted, at least the evil suspicion lingers and grows by constant reiteration ; and, were it not for the sober second thought, guided and controlled by reason, trust and confidence in all things might readily be destroyed by unscrupulous partisans.

We have had a remarkable instance of this irresponsible power of the press, in its ability for a time to strike down to the dust an institution that has for eighty years contributed so largely to the glory of our country. An institution, like an individual, has a character and a personality. Affections emanate from the individual which are manifested in acts, and modify the aggregate good or evil of the community. From an institution individual actors go out, each typical of the good or evil influence exerted by it.

If the public press be correct in its interpretation, then is West Point no longer an institution of thorough education, manly qualities, or devoted duty, but a hot-bed of aristocracy, of caste, of outrage, and insurrection. Is it possible that this change in its nature should be so sudden, so complete, so radical, and yet not be apparent to those who are charged with its administration ?

General Scott, although not a graduate, has said : "I give it as my fixed opinion that, but for our graduated cadets, the war between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would, have lasted some four or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share ; whereas, in less than two campaigns, we conquered a great peace without the loss of a single battle or skirmish."

The records of both sides of the civil war attest the continuance of this professional ability. Millions of the public money are yearly appropriated, to be disbursed under the direction of the graduates of the Military Academy, by distinct Congressional enactment.

Besides the 829 officers in the service, many more are engaged in the various professions of civil life, of whom it may truly be said that every quality that guarantees to men the admiration of their fellows and the respect and gratitude of the community, has adorned their public and private lives.

The wisdom of Washington led to the foundation of the Academy. Nature and art have united in making this favored spot perfect in its scenery, its surroundings, and appointments. But neither buildings nor surroundings are the essentials of an institution of learning. The inherent qualities of truth and justice must mold its character, shape its actions, and define its destiny. Previous to 1819 the Academy was but a simple school of practice and of learning. Subsequently General Thayer, with a far-reaching purpose, a strong will, and a comprehensive understanding of its necessities, gave it the vitality which has enabled it to pass from healthy childhood to vigorous manhood.

This nation is preëminently a people of peaceful pursuits. With the highest possible belief in our destiny, and with an indifference to the lessons of history, we trust to Providence for the future, believing that in our emergency the God of battles will see us safely through. A few far-seeing statesmen have, however, advocated the establishment by law of this Military Academy, and the maintenance of a small regular army, in order to keep active the study of the military art, and to have something at least to rely upon in time of war. The appropriation of the necessary funds for the education of the fifty cadets (one to each million inhabitants) annually sent out from the Academy, is attended by vigorous debates in Congress, a masterly conflict of personal animosities, and much greater legislative efforts than when vastly greater sums are appropriated for the improvement of a few small creeks. But the results of the Academy and the deeds of the army are a sufficient answer to any question of the value of either.

How are the young men, who are gathered here from all parts of the country, trained and made competent to perform their duties as officers in the army of the United States?

Congress has enacted that candidates for admission into the Military Academy shall be selected from each Congressional district; shall be between seventeen and twenty-two years of age, of healthy *physique*, and have sufficient mental capacity to pass an examination in United States history, geography, English grammar, reading, writing and orthography, and arithmetic. In these days

of universal education no class of people, nor any section of the country, can be barred by these simple requirements from its benefits. Congress has not pretended heretofore to determine either the social status or the religious belief of the eligible candidates. The latter, having reached the age of young manhood, are presumed to reflect the social feelings, sentiments, and beliefs of the communities which they represent. Statistics show that at present about 39 per cent. appointed fail to pass the preliminary examination, and among these are found many who give vent to their disappointment by abusing the Academy in its extremity, whose requirements are so severe as to prevent their admission.

The method of instruction can be characterized by a single word—*thoroughness* in every branch, whether drill, discipline, or study. The work is laborious, systematic, ceaseless. The scope of instruction is limited to the few branches of study that are presumed to give the best possible education for the end in view. Efficiency is attained in drill by constant practice. The times allotted for this part of the training are so arranged as to make the drill act as recreation to body and mind after the latter has been employed in the severest mental labor. A healthy body, with a vigorous constitution and fine physical development, is thus attained and becomes the abiding-place of a strong and progressive intellect. Not to every one are these gifts given in the same measure; but to each his own, determined by his natural talents, capacity, and special peculiarity.

Statistics show that 61 per cent. of those who enter, or 38 per cent. of those appointed, succeed now in graduating—a larger proportion than ever before.

I believe that the system of education here employed is the best that can be devised for the purpose. In what does education consist? Certainly, not wholly in the acquisition of knowledge during the formative period of youth. Of what intrinsic value are the facts of knowledge obtained while in college or academy? Education is essentially mental and moral discipline, continued consistently and consecutively during a reasonably definite period of time when the rational and emotional faculties have their most rapid development. Now, we get this discipline at the Military Academy by the *culture and practice of truth*, and by *requiring and obtaining* a definite number of hours of *hard study* on each specified task. We are assured that this mental labor has been expended by a close and thorough examination of each cadet at every recitation.

It is my pleasure to make yearly visits to some of the more prominent colleges of the country, and I have never heard recitations that will even fairly compare with those that are daily made here. My personal experience and conclusions based upon it have been confirmed by many eminent professors, who have expressed to me their gratification at the thorough work done by our cadets.

The course of studies comprises briefly :

1. *Pure mathematics*, embracing algebra, geometry, trigonometry, analytical and descriptive geometry and the calculus. These are designed to develop the reasoning powers and to lay a foundation for the sciences which form a large part of the military art.

2. *Physics*, comprising analytical mechanics, principles of molecular science, heat, sound, light, astronomy, chemistry, mineralogy, and geology. These are to some extent supplemented by practical applications, and are the natural sequence of the mathematical studies.

3. *Languages*, embodying English grammar, rhetoric, and composition, French, and Spanish. These are studied during the first two years (except Spanish, which comes during the last year of the course), in order to enable the cadet to understand the structure of his own language, to express his thoughts and observations with clearness and brevity, and to place within his reach literature largely connected with his profession. Spanish is deemed a necessary acquisition, because of the near presence of Spanish-speaking people, on the Mexican frontier, in the West Indies, and South America.

4. *Professional studies*, which comprise the minor tactics of the three arms of the service, ordnance and gunnery, topographical and free-hand drawing, international, constitutional, and military law, strategy, grand tactics, the art of war, civil and military engineering.

The resident faculty of the Academy are but eight in number, but they have had, with few exceptions, not only varied experience in the art of instruction, but have been themselves actors in the great war through which this country has but recently passed, and their united judgment as to the utility and proper relations of such a course is entitled to respect and confidence.

This is, however, but a part of a cadet's education. Intellectually, our graduates have been able to hold a respectable place in the nation. What is their reputation as men of probity and general morality? Well, fortunately we have history to speak for us. General George W. Cullum has, in the midst of professional duties of no little magnitude, compiled the record of *every* graduate of the

Academy. In three large volumes will be found the name, the services, the fate, of every one of its graduated pupils, from 1802 to July 1, 1878. The total number to July 1, 1879, is 2,826. Of this number, but thirty-eight have been finally dismissed for cause (exclusive of sympathy with the rebellion), or but little more than one per cent. of the whole, as follows :

For drunkenness.....	10
For causes not specified.....	10
For neglect of duty and conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman...	8
For having failed to render accounts.....	6
For misapplication of public funds.....	3
For cowardice.....	1

This record and these cases extend over a period of nearly eighty years ; and, while it would be a matter of just pride to ourselves and the country to have the above a blank, it is, as it stands, a most gratifying record. Can any profession, even the ministry, whose members are so far removed from temptation, exemplify in so striking a manner the existence and real presence of the qualities that enoble mankind ?

Now, an institution that lays bare its inmost nature to so close a public inspection can demand a suspension of judgment when assailed even in the Senate of the United States. There is no warrant for its immediate condemnation ; and we, who know the nature of its teachings and the moral growth of its pupils, are in duty bound to express our trust, confidence, and steadfast belief in its good name and honor, and shall, while these remain, be its defenders.

Even in a Christian sect, which has established its code of morals and of conduct, by the violation of which sympathy and companionship cease, there are certain minor departures from the standard which do not necessarily involve complete or even partial severance of the ties of brotherhood. Men join the church, and still continue in active competitive business. Some still edit newspapers, others watch the rise and fall of stocks ; yet all are in good church standing. But there are other acts and other business which, being done, shut the door.

The one sure, strong safeguard of the Military Academy is the degree in which its pupils hold sacred their word of honor. *They will not lie nor steal.* He who is guilty of either of these violations of the moral code is for ever an outcast. Now, history teaches that, when in a community the vital principle of truth can reach down into and lay hold of the springs of human action, that community will

do right and grow in power and wisdom. Especially is this true of an army that may in times of trouble hold in its hands the liberties of a people. Without truth and honor, the army is a festering sore, a spreading corruption. The graduates of West Point can point with just pride to their individual and united histories and await the severest inspection.

How have they behaved in time of war? Two hundred and forty-seven killed in battle is the answer. Many more stricken down with disease or wounds received in the line of duty. With scarcely ten years of war in the aggregate, this roll intensifies the well-merited approbation of General Scott. How have they performed their duties in times of so-called peace? The stories of arduous campaigns against hostile tribes in the intensest heat of summer, and terrible storms of winter; the survey of vast domains, the construction of public works, the improvement of rivers and harbors, the faithful expenditure of the public money, without a dollar sticking to their fingers, attest both their ability and their conscientious devotion to duty, to honor, and to the highest morality.

Can it be possible that these facts are unknown to our people? Has it come to this, that so faithful a body of men, of whom the country should be proud, must, at the intemperate outcry of a partisan press, be compelled to speak of their character and deeds in self-defense?

Having briefly touched upon the main characteristics of the Academy, I now come to the question of caste. There are many people who delight in prescribing rules of life and conduct for their neighbors, but who take good care to follow their own inclinations for themselves. I have had an intimate acquaintance with the Academy for seventeen years in my relations as cadet, officer, and professor. I therefore speak from personal knowledge, and say that there is neither caste nor aristocracy now, and never has been, among the cadets. Men arrange themselves here, as elsewhere, by sympathy, by similarity of tastes, by ability, intelligence, and aptitude in their profession. I have known the son of a poor Irish laborer take and keep the head of his class, gain the love and friendship of his comrades, and, when he fell at the head of his regiment at Gettysburg, his death was mourned with as sincere sorrow as that felt among brothers of one family. The sons of the poor and the rich, of the influential and the obscure, of the educated and the uncultured, mingle together and take a rank due alone to their mental and moral natures, irrespective of their antecedent accidents of birth, wealth, or social condition.

But, in 1870, a representative of the people, as was his right, sent to the Academy a young colored man to enter as a cadet. Whether it was wise to endeavor to solve the problem of the social equality of the races at that time and at this place was not a question for the authorities of West Point to discuss. They were the servants of the people, and the letter of appointment of new Cadet Smith was as valid a document as that of any other appointee, and entitled him to equally respectful treatment. But, in the light of events, if this problem was to be solved in the completest manner, a decent representative of the colored race, who united in himself at least average ability with agreeable manners, should have been selected. The young man in question was in disposition irascible, easily provoked, and vindictive. From certain facts I believe that these qualities were developed by other influences exterior to the Academy. His ability was not sufficient for his successful passing the requirements of the Academy. As he was for the last year of his stay under my personal supervision and instruction, I speak from personal knowledge. I was anxious for his success, and did all that was possible to make his success assured. I have now before me a complete record of his daily work. Briefly I may state that on the 25th of October, 1873, his class rank was forty-one out of forty-six, and at the close of the January examination became forty-five. During the next session his deficiencies became so apparent that, even with the greatest allowances in his favor, he fell with two of his white classmates below the line of proficiency, and all were accordingly dropped. One of these was the son of a distinguished officer of the army, still in the service, and, if even sympathy for the heroic deeds of a veteran could have influenced the Academic board, his son would have passed. But the records of that board show that its decisions are rendered with a judicial fairness and impartiality as perfect as human nature usually dictates.

As regards the personal relations of Cadet Smith with his comrades, a perusal of the record of his violation of regulations shows that he came prepared to make trouble. He was not slow to take offense even where none was intended. His conduct and manners were such that the isolation that was his lot would have been the fate of any white cadet under similar circumstances. But because of the peculiar status of Cadet Smith his grievances were largely magnified, were reported by him to the authorities, and resulted in severer punishment to those of his comrades who were so unfortunate as to be brought into relations with him.

As a natural sequence, every possibility of annoyance was carefully avoided, and his isolation during release from duty was complete.

Since 1870 at least ten colored cadets have been appointed to West Point, of which number seven succeeded in passing the preliminary examination. Of these only four remained one year, three till the close of the third year, and one has graduated. They have all displayed a marked deficiency in deductive reasoning, and have taken very low rank in mathematical subjects, but generally possess excellent memories.

Having indicated the origin, in part, of colored Cadet Smith's isolation, I may add the statement that this lack of personal association was extended to all of his color who succeeded him; and while there were and are now many cadets who have no pronounced prejudice on the question of color, *the fact* that, in any altercation where a colored cadet was a party, punishment of the white cadet was more certain, more severe and speedy, was the real origin of this separation of the races. Other cadets often settled their personal difficulties in the old-fashioned way, and the authorities never officially heard of them. The isolation, which, however, had nothing of hatred in it, had really commenced to decline, as is clearly shown in the late investigation, where the human sympathy existing in the hearts of Cadets Peck, Catlin, and others had been expressed to colored Cadet Whittaker.

Now, it ought to be remembered, to the credit of the corps of cadets, that in no case has there ever been the slightest indignity ever offered to their colored companions. They have neither been "hazed" nor "deviled." Being without the pale of social recognition, they have likewise been exempt from all possible annoyance. No man of right feeling can commend any conduct that is not in accord with the golden rule; but we have no right to expect in this transition period any higher standard of conduct, with respect to an almost *universal prejudice*, among the young than is exhibited and inculcated by their parents, relations, and friends. There is a vast difference between a moral precept in the abstract and its practical operation in the daily life, and generally we find that those who complain the most loudly are apt to be the farthest in the rear with respect to the question at issue. Let the authorities send here some young colored men who in ability are at least equal to the average white cadet, and possessed of manly qualities, and no matter how dark be the color of the skin, they will settle the question here as it

must be settled in the country at large, on the basis of human intelligence and human sympathy.

Cadet Whittaker is the third of his race that has advanced to the close of the third year of the course. Competing with his classmates, he was transferred on the 13th of March to the last section of his class, in the most important of his present studies. On the 6th of April the country was startled by a tale of outrage upon him, which, if true, should have awakened the just indignation of the people, and be followed by the speedy condemnation of the Academy. But the story was far from the truth ; and, while it would be wrong to express any decided opinion on the merits of the case while the court of inquiry is engaged in its thorough investigation, it seems to me proper to correct the erroneous views which have been derived from the current sensational stories of the day.

1. *His wounds.* They are now entirely healed, and are not noticeable except upon close inspection. When fresh they were five in number. *First*, in order of magnitude, was a *flesh* cut on the lobe of the right ear below the gristle, one eighth of an inch deep at the deepest part ; it is neither a notch nor a slit, but a cut. *Second*, the *slightest* portion of the *extreme* edge of the *lower tip* was cut off of the left ear. *Third*, the most superficial cut (not deeper than a pin-scratch), on the back of the left hand, that it is possible to make with the point of a knife or sharp cutting instrument. *Fourth* and *fifth*, two very superficial parallel cuts, about five eighths of an inch in length, on the top of the little toe of his left foot.

2. *His condition when found.* His pulse, respiration, and temperature were normal. He readily returned to wakefulness and was fit for his accustomed academic duty shortly after breakfast the same morning. He had no contusion, abrasion, or evidence of a blow upon his person ; no blood below his nostril, to indicate bleeding of the nose, and none of the symptoms indicated in medical works which accompany restoration from unconsciousness.

3. *His previous treatment.* On the part of the Superintendent, professors, instructors, and officers at the Academy, and by the authorities at Washington, he had received, because of his color, marked advantages, beyond those usually extended to his white comrades, and to which he now owes his position as a cadet. His comrades have in a very few instances spoken words of encouragement to him, one has visited him in a friendly way in his room, but the large majority of his class have not sought nor invited social intercourse with him. (Social intimacies are usually confined to

classes, rarely until the last year going outside of them.) All cadets (with two exceptions) have refrained, in the most scrupulous manner, from even the slightest insult, indignity, hazing, or objectionable conduct toward him. One of the exceptions occurred nearly four years ago, when the offending cadet under some provocation struck him a blow, but was by sentence of court-martial promptly dismissed. Nothing in his daily recitations indicated any gloom or despondency. He has been attentive, unassuming, and irreproachable in his conduct.

Every cadet, in the most solemn manner, and under oath, has testified to absolute ignorance in regard to the alleged assault or note of warning ; and, while it is barely possible that, among a body of two hundred and eighty young men gathered from all parts of the country, there might be three such inhuman wretches who, if guilty of such an outrage, would perjure themselves, it is not possible, from the intimate relations they bear to each other in their pursuits and habits of life, to keep such a secret so closely guarded from at least the suspicion of one honorable man. I personally believe them to be truthful men and that they have neither lied, prevaricated, nor concealed anything connected with this affair.

The court is composed of officers of experience, of honor, of integrity and probity, and the country can afford to await the result of its findings. Cadet Whittaker is represented by his counsel, an officer whose judgment, ability, and perfect belief in his innocence are unquestioned, while he himself is left free to attend to his academic duties, the performance of which is absolutely necessary for his complete success at the coming examination.

The bodily injury to Cadet Whittaker is practically nothing, but the Academy has received wounds which are still fresh and bleeding. All are fully agreed that it is absolutely necessary, for the honor of the Academy, that the authors of this outrage should be discovered and summarily dealt with. Whatever may be the result, I believe that the Academy has not received justice. It has been condemned unheard. Its past history, its glorious record, its sturdy uprightness, have availed nothing against the fury of popular passion, unduly excited by the dissemination of glaring falsehoods. But we, who know its true character and believe in its noble mission, can not doubt that the institution which has never yet failed to meet the utmost demands of the people, in times of real trial and danger, will again assert the value of established character and of devotion to the truth.

PETER S. MICHIE.